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***Would help keep Barnegat Bay clean, protect wildlife***

By KIRK MOORE, APP STAFF WRITER • July 2, 2010

Congressional proposal to fund \$20 million a year in stormwater basin improvements could help Ocean County and other coastal communities tackle nutrient overloads that are fouling Barnegat Bay and other estuaries, according to Rep. John Adler, D-N.J., who this week introduced the measure in Congress.

"We know one of the problems is mismanagement of stormwater basins," said Adler, who wrote bill HR 5670 to attract support from legislators in other coastal states too. "We can't keep putting off this work. . . . Barnegat Bay is an economic engine for the region."

The measure introduced Thursday would provide \$20 million a year for five years for grants to local governments. The money would be used for renovating retention basins, which research has shown often lose their functionality within a few years and do little to filter storm water before it reaches the bay.

Barnegat Bay researchers say modern basins should collect storm runoff not just to prevent flooding, but to prevent the water from carrying lawn fertilizer, pet waste and other contaminants directly into storm drains. Thousands of pounds of nitrogen compounds carried in every month during rains over-fertilize the bay and trigger algae blooms that foul the waters and habitat for fish and crabs, scientists say.

Getting that storm water into the soil, so biological processes can help filter it, is critical to restoring water quality in Barnegat Bay, experts told the state Department of Environmental Protection in meetings this spring.

But many of the 2,700 basins in the bay watershed do not function properly, often because their

bottom soils have been compacted during construction and frequent mowing, according to reports by the Ocean County Soil Conservation District. Restoring those basins would be one of the big-ticket public works items for any bay restoration program.

"We have to make certain sacrifices with that, and it's going to cost money too," said county Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari. "We're one of 28 estuaries in the National Estuary Program. Obama should put that stimulus money into them, just as we would for saving national parks."

Gov. Chris Christie has said he wants action to tackle the nutrient pollution issue, and Adler said he's had conversations with Christie and DEP Commissioner Bob Martin. The federal proposal should be broadly attractive to lawmakers from other states whose estuaries face serious environmental problems, Adler said.